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ABSTRACT

Perspectives concerning accreditation standards for colleges and universities and assumptions about institutional quality are considered. The various accrediting agencies and associations focus on a broad set of criteria that are generally perceived and promoted to be attributes of institutional program quality. The accrediting criteria of the six regional associations are used as guidelines to determine the extent to which institutions achieve their stated goals and objectives. The professional associations generally have developed more specific criteria. Accrediting criteria provide guidelines for program assessment, whereas standards establish baseline or minimum requirements for a number of program components (e.g., curricular structure and sequence skill development). Accrediting has two distinguishing characteristics relative to considering quality: accreditation focuses on the institution's capacity to achieve, and the extent to which it does achieve, articulated goals and objectives; and accreditation evaluations are not competitive (i.e., institutions are not compared and ranked). Although the public may view accreditation as a pass-fail assessment of institutional quality (and stability), it is claimed that in practice accreditation is an assessment that does not generally distinguish or promote high institutional performance and capacity beyond accreditation standards (guidelines and requirements). With respect to the assessment of quality in higher education, the literature suggests that accreditation describes (usually in very general terms), rather than distinguishes, the characteristics of institutional quality. (Author/SW)

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Accreditation and Quality:

Minimal Requirements versus Distinguishing Characteristics

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ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY:

MINIMAL REQUIREMENTS VERSUS DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

One feature of the American system of higher education which distinguishes it from its counterparts in the rest of the world is the absence of a centralized governmental administration for postsecondary education (Blauch, 1959). The major role of the federal government in the education enterprise is that of banker, i.e., it funds, but does not explicitly manage, education.[1] The institutional diversity which marks the American system of higher education has, since the end of the Civil War, given rise to concerns about quality: the diversity makes institutional comparisons and quality assessments a very difficult task. Although the states charter educational institutions, it is only of late that they have addressed the issue of program and institutional quality, and usually only within the public sector (Barak and Berdahl 1978; Green 1981). In the absence of (1) a federal ministry with regulatory responsibilities, and (2) coordinated enforcement and evaluation activities in and among the individual states, accreditation has developed into an operational attribute of (assumed or perceived) institutional quality.

Yet what is it about accreditation that assumes (or assures) institutional quality and inspires the faith of college bound-students, their families, and government agencies? Even though accreditation standards are not widely understood by the general public, students and their parents look to accreditation as an indicator of institutional quality and stability, and institutions

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[1]To be sure, the federal government does exercise power over the programs it elects to fund, and also may place restrictions or conditions upon the use of federal monies in various kinds of educational programs and/or institutions.

respond to these concerns by listing their affiliations with various accrediating bodies in their promotional literature. Accrediation is, in most instances, a prerequisite for participation in federal aid programs, both for institutions and for students (that is, students must be enrolled in accredited institutions in order to receive federal financial aid). Yet how strong is the relationship between accrediation and quality? And what are the attributes on institutional quality as defined in the literature on accreditation?

Institutional and program accreditation has always claimed to involve an assessment of quality. Seldon (1976) states that

> the original purpose of institutional accreditation was to establish some common standards among colleges and universities in order to improve articulation between high schools and colleges, and to protect the presumed better institutions from those that were shoddy, weak, and improperly competitive (p. 7).

The earliest instance of accreditation in this country probably dates back to 1787, when the New York State Legislature instructed the New York Board of Regents to make an annual inspection visit to every college in the state (Seldon and Porter 1977). After the Civil War, midwestern universities, led by the University of Michigan in 1870, began to certify or accredit secondary schools, in part to establish, both for the schools and for prospective students, standards regarding respectable collegiate preparation (Rudolph 1962: 282-283; Seldon 1960: 30-34). By the end of the 1920s, six regional and ten professional associations were in the business of accrediting institutions and programs. Currently more than fifty organizations have established

guidelines or standards for institutional and program accreditation (Seldon and Porter 1977).

Accreditation and Quality

The relation between quality and accreditation is made explicit in the statements of definition and purpose offered by experts in and representatives of the field. Some examples of their perspectives follow:

o Kenneth Young (1976a), the former president of the Council for Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), the national nongovernmental coordinating organization for accrediting agencies, told an audience at the 1976 meeting of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States (CGS) that if "accreditation can be defined in 25 words or less that definition would be: 'Accreditation is a process that attempts to evaluate and encourage institutional quality'" (p. 133)

o William Seldon (1960),for many years Executive Director of the National Commission on Accrediting, a predecessor of COPA, has described accrediting as the "process whereby an organization or an agency recognizes a college or university or program of study as having met certain predetermined qualifications or standards" (p. 6).

o Patricia Thrash (1979), of the North Central Association, states that accreditation "provides an assurance of . . . educational quality and integrity . . . to the educational community, the general public, and other agencies and organizations" (p. 6).

o Miller (1973:1) has described accreditation as "the single most important identification of quality in postsecondary programs and institutions." His Delphi survey of 45 accrediting organizations generated a list of eight functions for accrediting, the leading one being "the identifi cation, for public purposes, of educational institutions and programs of study which meet established standards of quality" (p. 149).

o Harcleroad and Dickey (1975) state that accrediting serves as "the major factor in quality control for our institutions of higher education and for various professional and specialized programs" (p. 7).

o The U.S. Advisory Committee on Accreditation and Institutional Eligibility (1977) indicates that the federal government uses accreditation as an eligibility criterion for participation in federal programs because accreditation provides "a reliable authority concerning the quality of training offered by institutions and programs" (p. iii, see also Trivett 1976: 8-10).

Promoted as an attribute of institutional quality, accreditation--because it is essentially a binary process--may actually impede true assessments of institutional quality. Accreditation provides for an assessment of institutional performance against institutional objectives or against other (baseline) standards: operationally, an institution or program either is, or is not, accredited. In contrast, quality (like wealth, beauty, and wisdom) exists on a continuum. In essence accreditation is similar to a pass-fail grading system -- an institution has, or has not, met minimum standards -- in contrast to quality rankings which attempt to provide

some form of competitive assessment of institutions and programs (see Lawrence and Green 1980).

While the accrediting community has been active in asserting the relation between quality and accreditation, it has been less precise in defining the actual attributes which make for institutional and program quality. This is probably due to two major considerations: first the cherished diversity in the American system of higher education which does not lend itself to uniform, operational standards; and second, the "consensual nature" of the attributes of quality. We all (think we) know what quality is when we see it, but we have difficulty describing it for others. Pirsig (1975) describes the definitional problem in a somewhat unconventional, but accurate way:

> Quality...you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. But that's self-contradictory. But some things are better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what that quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes poof! There's nothing to talk about. But if you can't say what Quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes it doesn't exist at all. But for all practical purposes it really does exist. What else are grades based on? Why else would people pay fortunes for some things and throw others in the trash pile? Obviously some things are better than others...but what's the "betterness"?... So round and round you go, spinning mental wheels and nowhere finding anyplace to get traction. What the hell is Quality? (p. 178).

Historical factors also contribute to the current ambiguity. Prior to the 1930s, accrediting association "standards" were concerned with what Petersen (1978: 309) refers to as "fundamental institutional characteristics" such as size, enrollment, facilities, and faculty training and salaries (i.e., quantitative attributes). In response to criticism directed at the accrediting agencies during the 1920s, the North Central Association, in 1929, undertook a comprehensive three-year study of accrediting standards that resulted in the recommendation that accrediting agencies move away from the strict use of quantitative criteria and instead focus on institutional purposes and objectives (North Central Association 1934; Seldon 1960; Harcleroad 1980). Since the 1930s the overall movement in accreditation has been away from the strict use of quantitative or institutional attributes and toward the articulation and assessment of generally qualitative goals and objectives.

Qualitative measures, however, remain somewhat ambiguous. As Allan Cartter observed in the first chapter of the 1966 American Council on Education study on graduate education, "quality is an elusive attribute, not easily subjected to measurements, [and] it is evident that [any factors referred to as objective measures] are for the most part 'subjective measures' once removed" (p. 4). Assessment is implicitly subjective: it involves (1) the selection of assessment criteria, and (2) the application of the criteria to a specific case.

Koff and Florio (1977:2-3) explain the ambiguity which exists in accrediting standards:

> Accreditation of professional education has been expected to serve a primary purpose of assuring quality. Hence, the status of being accredited is viewed as good. Quality, however, is difficult to define; there is no commonly accepted operational definition of quality as it relates to accreditation in any professional field, e.g., law, medicine, education, etc. As a result, accreditation, as a quality control procedure, is hardly an exact science. Every profession is responsible for developing a definition of quality that takes into consideration the complexities of the field it serves.

It is this sensitivity to what might be termed "field-specific" conditions that makes quality, particularly within the context of the accreditation process, so difficult to define. Accreditation indicates that some standards have been met, but it does not indicate the extent to which conditions exceed minimum requirements.

The movement from quantitative to qualitative evaluation suggests that the accreditation process is primarily a criterion-referenced assessment. The regional associations' self-study guides and accreditation documents describe the accrediting process as the assessment of an institution in terms of its stated purposes and objectives. Yet some accrediting agencies

currently do provide quantitative guidelines, and many are indeed interested in quantifiable data which help to describe institutional attributes and resources (Petersen 1978). The ambiguity of some of the criteria would appear to give accrediting agencies some flexibility with respect to enforcing standards; the diversity of the system would appear to require it.

A comparatively recent development in accreditation has been an interest in educational outcomes. Historically, accreditation has focused on evaluating inputs (e.g., students, finances) and processes (e.g., institutional resources such as faculty, lab facilities, and library size) (Barak 1977; Young 1976b). Changes in the employment market for college graduates, the stability of the financial base and the availability of financial resources for higher education, consumer attitudes toward higher education, and the expansion of nontraditional programs and institutions during the past decade have placed new demands upon institutions (and upon those organizations in the business of evaluating programs and institutions). Students as well as state legislatures are concerned with making effective investments with their educational dollars. Howard Bowen observes that

> as higher education has expanded and proliferated, the need and demand of society for consumer protection and accountability has become more urgent. In meeting new societal needs and demands, the procedures of accreditation must become more concerned with outcomes and less preoccupied with resource inputs. Accrediting

> bodies will have to provide some of the leadership, the encouragement, and even the clout necessary to persuade institutions to be more mindful of their own outcomes (1979:19).

Astin (1979:18) proposes a "new conception" of institutional quality that views a high-quality institution as "one that know what's happening to its students" and urges accrediting agencies not to equate quality with "physical facilities or curricula but rather with a continuing process of critical self-examination that focuses on the institution's contribution to the student's personal and intellectual development"(p. 18). Colleges and universities, states Astin (1977:12), "attempt to bring about desirable changes in the condition of their clients" (see also Bowen 1977:16). Astin's proposal would require institutions to engage in ongoing, longitudinal research to determine that institutional impacts have been, in fact, "desirable" and to identify those interventions which will improve or enhance desirable impacts. Although more difficult and certainly more demanding of institutional resources than current accrediting practices, outcome evaluation does provide a method for accurately assessing institutional impacts and may help to dispel certain "consensual truths" about the attributes of institutional quality and their impact on educational outcomes: For example, Astin (1968) reports that traditional indices of institutional quality (academic ability of entering students, per-student expenditures, student-faculty ratio, etc.) do not seem to contribute to overall student achievement and development.

Accrediting Criteria

The regional and professional associations, whose basic task is to insure that minimal standards are operationalized, have articulated certain principles and critieria, often referred to as standards or guidelines, which are promoted to be attributes of institutional and program excellence or quality.

Reviewing the published standards and guidelines of both regional and professional associations, Petersen (1978:306) concludes that "there is such a wide variety [of standards] among agencies that almost any blanket conclusion or generalization is suspect". Harris (1978) offers a somewhat different opinion. In a report prepared for COPA, he identifies seven criteria as being critical characteristics of an "accreditable" institution:[2]

1. Goals and Objectives. Because institutions are evaluated on the basis of their own purposes rather than by external standards, they must have explicit, comprehensive, and consistent goals and objectives which are subject to periodic review and revision.

2. Governance, Leadership, and Structure. A basic premise of acccreditation is that faculty possessing proper credentials will be significantly

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[2] Harris (1978:63) focuses on "accreditable" instead of "good" because the former term is the "more operational adjective," and because of the membership component in the accreditation process: i.e. "accreditation means that an institution makes itself amenable to the criteria and the procedures of the association in which it seeks membership".

evaluating students; faculty, therefore, will maintain academic standards because an appropriate structure of academic and administrative checks and balances exists to monitor effectively the institution with respect to its purposes, programs, curricular planning, and degree requirements.

3. Validity of Degrees. Student achievement is commensurate with the general meaning of degrees awarded, and the institution has a systematic method to assure that students meet the letter and the spirit of degree requirements.

4. Adequate Resources. Adequate human, physical, and fiscal resources, as judged by academic peers, exist to accomplish stated goals and objectives.

5. Stability. The prevailing values of the academy are best represented by institutions which display evidence of stability and permanence.

6. Students and Programs. Student needs, interests, and aspirations are reflected in institutional programs, and those services logically related both to the institutional mission and to student needs are provided.

7. Integrity. Institutional integrity is reflected in explicit goals and objectives; full disclosure of codes, rules, and practices; sound fiscal management; ethical recruitment and promotion practices; consistent application of institutional codes; and continued monitoring and self-assessment of institutional behavior and practices against stated goals and objectives.

Harris (1978: 62) suggests that accreditation policies reflect "the conventional wisdom of the academy [at any point in history] about quality." Yet current developments, such as nontraditional education, the increasing significance of accreditation in the quest for federal dollars, and the shift, at all degree levels, from a seller's to a buyer's market, pose a number of challenges to the "conventional wisdom" regarding quality and accreditation.

Troutt's (1979:201) textual analysis of the published criteria of the six regional accrediting associations reveals five criteria which "claim some association with quality assurance. . . . Most regional associations suggest a relationship between institutional quality and criteria for: (1) institutional purposes and objectives; (2) educational programs; (3) financial resources; (4) faculty; and (5) library/learning resources." Troutt identifies three basic assumptions underlying the criteria that the regional associatons promote as being related to institutional quality. First, judgments about quality should be based on inferences from specific conditions rather than on a direct evaluation of student performance. Second, no common benchmarks exist for measuring institutional quality. Finally, accreditation criteria equate higher education with a production process. These three assumptions contrast sharply with those of educational researchers such as Astin (1977) and Dressel (1978) who assert that quality judgments should be based on an assessment of student outcomes, that common benchmarks do exist, and that the production model is not the only, nor the best, model for describing higher education.

The overlapping seven "accreditable characteristics" described by Harris and the five "quality assurance" critieria identified by Troutt manifest themselves in various, often ambiguous, forms in the statements of standards and guidelines made by regional and professional accrediting agencies. The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (1978) lists nine broad "standards and areas for self-study": institutional purpose; governance and administration; educational program; faculty and staff; library and other learning resources; student services; physical resources; financial viability; and special educational programs. The Middle States Association makes the following statement regarding institutional quality:

> The major index of an institution's quality is the astuteness with which it has defined its task: another is the competence of the faculty. A third is the effectiveness of the programs created to produce the results envisioned by the objectives. The fourth is the resources available to instructors and students, especially the library, laboratories, and other facilties on and off-campus. These are what truly make an institution (1978:9-10).

Other regional associations offer similar general statements, focusing on institutional purpose, faculty, programs, and resources; these statements, however, are not about the "hard" attributes of quality. Some examples from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges' Handbook on Accreditation (1978) illustrate the problem:

1. Degree programs of quality are characterized by continuity, sequence, and integration (p. 14).

2. The most significant aspect of any institution is the quality of its educational program. Institutional policies and procedures designed to assure and maintain the quality in all aspects of the institution are of utmost importance in accreditation (p. 17).

3. No statements or promises are made [in institutional publications] that cannot be fully documented regarding the excellence of the program (p. 21).

4. Non-credit programs must maintain the same quality of planning and instruction maintained for all programs (p. 49).

It is only with reference to the guidelines pertaining to faculty that the Western Association standards approach specificity: Faculty must have graduate training and degrees "appropriate to their fields."

In spite of this obvious ambiguity in guidelines and standards, Anderson (1978:72) states that the Northwestern, Southern, and Western associations publish "rather detailed accrediting manuals." She attributes the comparative specificity of the documents of the Northwestern and Western Associations to the unusually large number of nontraditional institutions located in these regions. With respect to the South, Anderson states that the generally acknowledged uneven quality of higher education offerings in that region during the first part of this century required relatively

precise standards in order to raise the general level of institutional quality. Overall, however, the criteria or standards used by the regional accrediting associations to determine or assess institutional quality or excellence suffer from vagueness and lack of specificity.[3]

Graduate program accreditation, in contrast to general institutional accreditation as coordinated by the regional associations, is somewhat more specific about the attributes of program quality. Graduate education is, seemingly, a more sacred bastion than undergraduate education. Anderson (1978:279) observes that while the "higher education establishment could tolerate wide diversity and lesser quality in undergraduate programs and even at the master's level . . . it registers deep concern when the quality of the doctorate is diluted." Andrews (1978) asserts that there is an inverse relationship between enrollments by degree level and concern for program quality in higher education: Graduate and professional programs, which enroll the smallest number of students, have historically been the focus of the debates on quality, while lower-division, undergraduate, and vocational education have generally received little attention in such discussions. One recent survey of the literature confirms this contention: Articles and documents on graduate education and graduate rankings outnumbered those on undergraduate programs by a ratio of roughly six to one (Lawrence and Green 1980).

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[3]Again, Troutt (1979) as previously cited: "Accreditation criteria generally assume that no common benchmarks exist for assessing institutional quality."

The attributes of program quality identified by graduate and professional agencies focus on criteria similar to those identified by Harris (1978). A 1978 statement issued jointly by COPA and CGS summarizes the factors which accrediting agencies generally consider when conducting program reviews:

- clarity and appropriateness of objectives
- identity of graduate and professional programs as administrative units
- quality of faculty
- appropriateness of admission, retention, and degree requirements
- policies on academic credit
- policies on off-campus and extension courses
- adequacy of support services
- interaction and relation with the undergraduate program
- evidence of educational outcomes

The COPA-CGS document also asserts that institutions should assess program impact and outcomes:

> The primary focus [of accreditation] should be upon the determination of quality through an assessment of outcomes, i.e., the evidence which the institution/program is producing or seeking to produce concerning the attainment of stated objectives. For a graduate program, such evidence might appropriately include:

(1) students and alumni evaluation of their program and courses;

(2) longitudinal studies of the professional performance of alumni;

(3) data concerning the continuing scholarly performance of alumni;

(4) such information congruent with the stated objectives of the program and the institution.

Impromptu and infrequently published alumni surveys aside, however, few institutions collect longitudinal data on specific program or institutional impacts.

Nontraditional graduate education has created new problems for accrediting agencies insofar as the traditional benchmarks of program quality are often thought to be inappropriate for assessing, or even antithetical to, the purposes of nontraditional graduate programs. In a recent report prepared as part of the COPA task force study on nontraditional education, Dressel (1978:13) states that "certain fundamental considerations . . . provide the guiding principles and criteria for evaluating programs." He then identifies six criteria as factors basic to any assessment of program quality:

1. the institution and its learning resources
2. institutional faculty
3. curriculum and related learning experiences
4. evaluation of program impacts and outcomes
5. administration and governance
6. finance, including costs and their relationship to benefits

Dressel is highly critical of recent trends in graduate education that relate "graduate study to personal development rather than mastery of

a content, problem, or disciplinary area"; therefore, his emphasis on what might be deemed "traditional criteria" is not surprising.

The most specific (i.e., quantitative) accreditation guidelines are those developed by the various professional, or "field-specific," associations. These criteria establish guidelines for such things as: faculty work load; library facilties, including availability of certain reference or basic materials; curriculum; number of instructional or contact hours; and minimums for both faculty size and training (e.g., percentage with doctorates) (see Table 1). These standards are baseline measures, minimums

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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which cannot be transgressed without potential threat to program accreditation. Although they are promoted as attributes of program quality, and although they no doubt contribute to it, the actual correlation between these criteria (and others used by the regional agencies) and program quality has not been fully established (see Troutt 1979).

Summary and Conclusions

The guidelines and standards developed by the various accrediting agencies and associations focus on a borad set of criteria which are generally

TABLE 1

Accreditation Standards of Professional and Field-Specific Associations

Standards	Fields								
	Business	Chemistry[a]	Law	Psychology	Pharmacy	Engineering	Medicine	Dentistry	Public Administration (MPA)
Curriculum requirements	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Class or course requirements	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	
Faculty training/degrees	+	+	+	+					+
Minimum number of faculty	+	+	+			+			+
Faculty workload	+	+	+						+
Independent rearch guidelines	+	+	+	+	+				
Library facilities	+	+	+			+			
Laboratory/special facilities	+	+		+					
Affiliation with accredited institution	+	+	b	+	b	+	b	+	
Admission requirements or guidelines	+				+				

[a]Undergraduate chemistry programs certified by the American Chemical Society.

[b]Affiliation with an accredited institution is recommended but not required.

Source: Compiled by the author from association documents.

perceived and promoted to be attributes of institutional program quality (Table 2) The accrediting criteria of the six regional associations are used

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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as guidelines to determine the extent to which institutions achieve their stated goals and objectives. The professional associations generally have developed more specific criteria. Accrediting criteria provide guidelines for program assessment, whereas standards establish baseline or minimum requirements for a number of program components (e.g., curricular structure and sequence skill development). Articulated criteria aside, however, accrediting has two distinguishing characteristics relative to any discussion of quality: First, accreditation focuses on the institution's capacity to achieve, and the extent to which it does achieve, articulated goals and objectives; and second, accreditation evaluations are not competitive; i.e., institutions are not compared and ranked.

The ambiguity of the accreditation-quality relationship is perhaps best described by way of analogy. In 1977, Jewell Foods of Chicago began a national marketing trend when it introduced "no-name" or generic products, largely in response to consumer concern about increasing food costs (Cox 1978). No-name or plain-wrapper products, (e.g., canned fruits and vegetables, certain processed foods) provide a "third tier" of options for

TABLE 2

Attributes of Institutional or Program Quality

Attributes of Quality	COPA/CGS (1978)	Harris (1978)	Dressel (1978)	Troutt[a] (1979)		USOE/Advisory[b] Committee (1977)
Administration and governance	x	x	x	A		
Educational program (curriculum, standards, degrees, policies)	x	x	x	A	Q	
Educational resources (library, labs, etc.)	x	x	x	A	Q	
Finance (resources, management)		x	x	A	Q	
Goals and objectives	x	x		A	Q	x
Impact and outcomes	x		x	A		x
Personnel (faculty, administration)	x	x	x	A	Q	
Support services	x	x		A		

[a]Troutt distinguishes between these criteria common to most regional accrediting associations (A) and those criteria which, on the basis of a content analysis, are promoted or associated with the assessment of quality (Q).

[b]Requirements established by the USOE Division of Eligibility and Institutional Accreditation for national accrediting association assessment criteria.

for shoppers. They compete for the consumer's dollar with national "name-brand" products and with local or "house-brand" (i.e., private-label) products especially prepared for the supermarket chain. The national brands are generally the most expensive, the house brands are less expensive than the national brands, and the generic items are often 20-30 percent less than the nationally advertised products. The products are similar in that all three have been U.S. Government inspected; indeed the private-label and no-name brands promote quality assurance via Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspection. Be it pears, peas, or peanut butter, the consumer confronts a choice: well-known national brands, promoted for their quality (tested and known for their quality?); house or regional brands; and generic no-name brands, promoted for their "acceptable" quality and overall low cost. Product quality is assured because of USDA inspection. But does the consumer really know (and understand) the meaning of the USDA standards, and what differences, aside from price, distinguish the namebrand items from the no-name. generic goods?

Consumers confront similar choices (and must make similar judgments) about college quality, generally at the same level of ignorance. In the pluralistic and generally unregulated world of American higher education, there are, in essence, three types of institutions: those which are "name-brands,: those which has regional or local reputations, and those of low visibility. Accreditation assures minimal levels of quality in all three types of institutions, but it does not help to distinguish the differences that separate the highly visible from the little known.

Institutions that promote themselves as being fully accredited contribute to the public conception that accreditation is a pass-fail assessment of

institutional quality (and stability). In practice, however, accreditation is an assessment which does not generally distinguish or promote high institutional performance and capacity beyond accreditation standards (guidelines and requirements). With respect to the assessment of quality in higher education, the literature suggests that accreditation describes (usually in very general terms), rather than distinguishes, the characteristics of institutional quality.

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